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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004218

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: SHAMAR CHIEF ON KURD EXPANSIONISM,
EMPLOYMENT, AND LAND DISPUTES

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader James Knight. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).
This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

Summary

¶1. (C) The predominant Shamar Tribe chief in Ninewa, Ahmad Abdullah al-Yawer, urgently met PRT Team Leader Knight and Multilateral Division North Deputy Commander BG Wiercinski's representative, COL Lull, to express Shamar alarm at Kurd territorial ambitions in Ninewa. A group of subordinate Shamar leaders also attended to warn of violence if Kurd territorial ambitions proceed unchecked. Abdullah also asked for Coalition support for Shamar recruitment into Iraqi security forces (especially the Iraqi Army), and pointed out that disputes arising from Shamar land given to settlers under Saddam's Arabization program are being peacefully resolved. End summary.

¶2. (C) PRT Leader Knight and COL Kenneth Lull, Deputy Commander for the 25th Infantry Division Tactical HQ (Forward), met Sheik Abdullah for lunch 2 Nov, at his home near Rabe'a and on his urgent invitation. Knight and Lull were accompanied by PRT Deputy Team Leader COL Brackney and representatives of the 403d Civil Affairs Battalion team working in the area. Abdullah had been trying to arrange this meeting since the middle of Ramadan, and was clearly relieved that we had accepted this invitation.

We're not Kurds . . .

¶3. (C) Abdullah opened the meeting by pointing out that Shamars are closer to Coalition forces than to GOI authorities, whom they have found unresponsive and unengaged. He then showed a video taped during his annual Eid al-Fitr meeting with several dozen senior Shamar leaders, at which he exhorted them to assure that insurgents are not allowed passage or safehaven by Shamars. In his taped remarks he also pointed out that, although Shamars have always considered Kurds their brothers, they will refuse to be incorporated into the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). His final taped remarks emphasized that resolution of land disputes by Shamars must be peaceful. At Abdullah's request, our PRT translator related Abdullah's remarks in English.

. . . and we don't want to be

¶4. (C) After the video screening, Abdullah explained at length that he and Kurd leaders have always maintained a positive relationship, but that he has reiterated many times to KRG leaders that, although the Kurds are the Shamars' brothers, Shamars are not Kurds and do not wish to be brought under Kurdish control. In response to a Team Leader query regarding Kurd responses in these discussions, particularly in view of the efforts made to resolve 'disputed territories' in Ninewa, Abdullah indicated only that discussion continues. (Note: The disputed territories in Ninewa include Shikhan, Makhmur, Sinjar, and Acre Districts, and parts of Tal'Afar District as well. End note.) He emphatically added that any referendum held to determine adherence to the KRG would be rigged by the Kurds to falsely reflect Shamar sentiment.

They're keeping us out of the Army

¶5. (C) Elaborating on his remarks about lack of engagement by GOI authorities in his areas, Abdullah pointed to the inability of Shamar youth to join the Iraqi army. He produced a petition to him signed by approximately fifty Shamar young men to complain that they had not been permitted to enlist. He added that Ninewa is the only area in Iraq except Ramadi district (al-Anbar Province) in which security forces are primarily staffed by individuals

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without roots in the areas where they serve.

¶6. (C) Abdullah insisted that while this problem is somewhat less pronounced with the police, Shamar have been almost uniformly unsuccessful in their efforts to join the Iraqi Army. Abdullah also indicated he has begun a series of meetings which will culminate in a large meeting of traditional tribal leaders in Mosul to address security concerns in the province, including security forces recruitment. (Note: Abdullah's efforts are apparently not linked to Sheik outreach now underway by Provincial authorities in Mosul. End note.)

¶7. (C) Abdullah made the same point in response to COL Lull's query regarding the situation at the Port of Entry at Rabe'a -- corruption continues to be a problem there because so few of the officials are recruited from the Shamar, who know the area. He believes at least half the police and border authorities -- include the leadership -- should be drawn from localities around Rabe'a, which would be mostly Shamar. These points were also detailed in a letter from the Shamar leadership recently sent to the Minister of Interior.

Dealing with Saddam's settlers

¶8. (C) When asked by Team Leader Knight to clarify the land disputes addressed in his taped remarks, Abdullah indicated that the disputes in question arose from efforts by Shamar to reclaim land distributed to Arab settlers under Saddam's Arabization programs, mostly near Bayji. Abdullah insisted those disputes are being resolved successfully and peacefully.

¶9. (C) Abdullah provided his visitors with a

generous lunch, after which he asked Team Leader Knight and COL Lull to hear the concerns of a group of about 30 Shamar leaders who had gathered to meet our party. Those individuals successively reiterated Shamar concerns about Kurdish ambitions, but emphasized the likelihood of violence if those ambitions are not checked. They also emphasized the responsibility of Coalition forces to oversee events and protect the Shamar and others in the face of these threats.

Comment

¶10. (C) Sheik Abdullah has enjoyed a generally positive and mutually supportive relationship with Coalition forces since their arrival in 2003, although his occasionally murky economic interests at the Rabe'a POE doubtless play a part in his expressed concerns. However, at this meeting those issues were emphatically secondary to his urgent plea against Kurdish expansionism -- specifically as it threatens to incorporate the Shamar and the areas of Tal'afar and Sinjar Districts where they predominate into the KRG. The Sunni Shamar of Ninewa are united with most non-Kurds in their alarm at the snowballing Kurdish expansion agenda in the province.

¶11. (C) Comment continued: Complaints of selective recruiting into Ninewa's security services -- especially the Iraqi Army -- have been made by most spokesmen for minority communities and by Ninewa's predominant Sunni political leadership. This issue is especially critical in the runup to eventual resolution of Kurdish territorial ambitions, since the Iraqi Army in Ninewa is widely perceived -- with some justification -- as simply reflagged Kurdish Peshmerga.

¶12. (C) Comment continued. The conversation with Abdullah regarding repossession of lands expropriated in support of Arabization under Saddam was one of the few windows we yet have had on this festering problem, apart from Kurds' dismissive comments to the effect that the issue is fundamentally irrelevant. The general perception is that most Arabization settlers simply left after the

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fall of Saddam, but we will pursue clarification of this matter. End comment.
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